

How to use floodlights for photos

By Carl Kramer

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QUESTION: I received a beautiful set of floodlights and stands as a present. These had been at the top of my wish list because I wanted to become more involved with pictures of people indoors.

My problem is that I'm getting conflicting advice from my husband, the salesman at the photo store and my photography teacher. No one seems to agree on how to place the lights, what film to use or even what lens I should have on my camera. I own a Pentax P-3 with a 50mm lens and also a 70-210mm zoom lens.

Can you referee and give me some straight answers, please?

ANSWER: Without knowing what you've been told, I can't referee. I can, however, pass on some thoughts of my own and those of other photographers I talked to:

First, you have almost everything you'll need to make those closeup portraits you're after. Two floodlights on adjustable stands is a good way to go.

To this you can add a reflector; aluminum foil or white cloth thumbtacked or taped to a fairly large piece of cardboard will work beauti-

fully. I generally use the foil indoors and the white cloth outdoors. Crumple the foil into a ball, carefully uncrumple it and attach it to the cardboard. The wrinkles in the foil will serve as individual reflectors and the entire collection will be very strong.

For your floods, choose either 3200 Kelvin or 3400 Kelvin for the correct color temperature, and buy both 500-watt and 250-watt bulbs. Use the 500-watt as the main light and the 250-watt as a secondary light. Your foil reflector can be used as a third source of illumination.

Invest in an 80 A or 80 B filter. With this, you can use standard color print film rather than special tungsten film, which may not be available in all stores. The 80-series filters will "cool" the exposure down and standard film will be fine.

At the start, I would suggest you shoot with either the Fuji HG 400 or the Agfacolor 200. Save both the faster and slower films until later.

Use your 70-210mm zoom lens. Depending on your camera-to-subject distance and your lighting arrangement, you will probably end up with the lens zoomed to between 100 and 135mm. This usually gives a good size head-and-shoulders shot, and will allow the background to drop out of focus.

A simple, plain background is best to emphasize your subject. Decorations such as pictures and bric-a-brac in your room will only distract. Rig a sheet or blanket on a wall. Pastel colors are best, dark ones are hard to light. Seat your subject about three feet in front of the background and begin your lighting.

The placement of your lights is not difficult. Set your main, 500-watt lamp slightly to the side and about a foot higher than your subject's face, and tilt it down toward the nose. The second light should be at about double the distance away, on the opposite side and slightly lower. Use your reflector between the second light and your camera.

Be careful of shadows made by glasses on your subject's face. Adjust your lights to remove them.

You'll have to experiment until you find the kind of light that pleases you. For your first couple of rolls, keep careful notes on exposure, film and lighting. Simple sketches will help when you look at your processed film.

There are some really good books and tapes on portraiture at many camera stores. They may help.

Write to Carl Kramer, c/o Weekend, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. N.W., Washington, DC 20045.

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